

PETITION

OF

SUNDRY INHABITANTS OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI,

UPON THE SUBJECT OF A

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SAID STATE

AND

*The Internal Provinces of Mexico,*

WITH A LETTER FROM

ALPHONSO WETMORE,

UPON THE SAME SUBJECT.

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FEBRUARY 14, 1825.

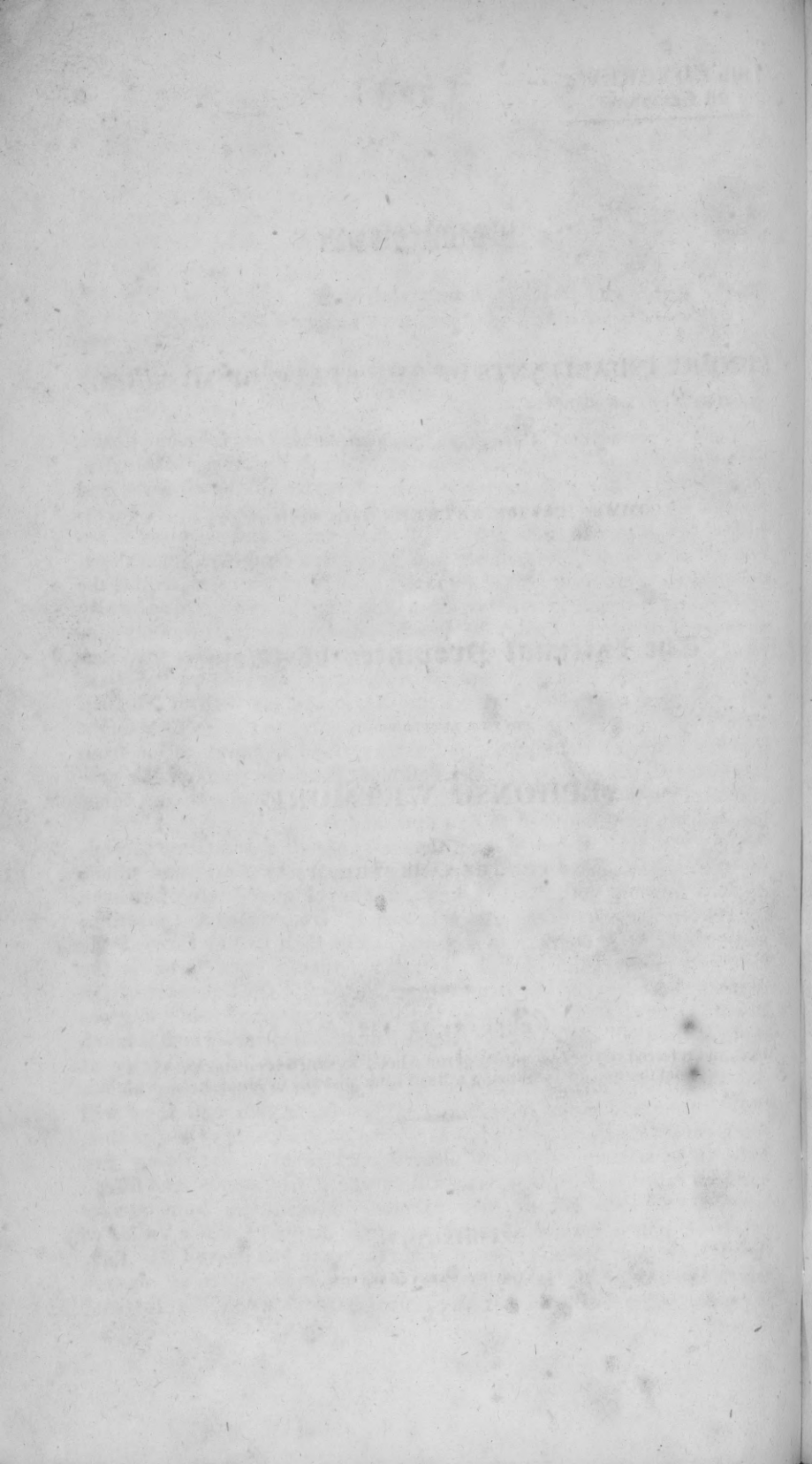
Read, and referred to the Committee of the whole, to which is committed the bill from the Senate authorizing a Road from Missouri to Mexico.

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WASHINGTON:

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1825.



## PETITION.

*To the Senate and House of Representatives  
Of the United States of America in Congress assembled.*

The petition of the undersigned, inhabitants of the state of Missouri,  
RESPECTFULLY SHEWS:

That a commercial intercourse has been carried on, for some years, between the state of Missouri and the Internal Provinces of Mexico, commenced on the sole industry and enterprise of the citizens, and carried on without government protection, until, from small beginnings, it has grown to be a trade of much value, and promises to become, (with some countenance and protection from the general government,) a permanent and lucrative branch of the commerce of the state. The Internal Provinces, from their local position, are naturally dependent upon the Valley of the Mississippi for their annual supplies of foreign goods. The Rio Grande del Norte, which traverses several of the provinces, is incapable of navigation, because the channel is choked with sand between the Passo and the Gulf of Mexico. Vera Cruz has, heretofore, been the port of entry to the goods brought into the Internal Provinces, and the overland communication from this point to the principal cities and most populous parts of the provinces of New Biscay, New Mexico, Coaquilla, Sonora, and Sinaloa, is from one thousand to two thousand miles.

Over this long distance, upon the backs of mules, sometime ascending mountains, and sometime crossing large tracts of arid and sterile deserts, infested with robbers, have supplies of goods heretofore been brought to the provinces called "Internal," from their local position; and embracing a country of greater extent than two or three of the first rate monarchies of Europe put together. Vera Cruz is the nearest and best port on the Gulf of Mexico. On the coast of the Pacific Ocean, at the mouth of the Rio de Santiago, some degrees south of the Gulf of California, is the port of San Blas, which is much nearer than Vera Cruz to the Internal Provinces; but, to arrive at this port from Europe or America, Cape Horn must be doubled—twenty thousand miles of ocean must be traversed; and then will commence the same overland conveyance on mules, over mountains, with their accompaniment of deserts and robbers, extending five hundred miles to Durango, near a thousand to Chihuahua, and fifteen hundred to Santa Fe, of New Mexico. Merchants, from remote points or ports, cannot contend with merchants from the Valley of the Mississippi: the experience of three years has proved this fact, which the face of the maps had previously announced, to all observing men. The Valley of the Mississippi borders upon the Internal

Provinces—the noble rivers of this valley draw their waters from the immediate confines of these Provinces. From the frontier settlements in Missouri and Arkansas, it is but fourteen degrees of longitude to Santa Fe and Chihuahua. (equal to about seven hundred miles.) the intervening country, level, open, practicable for carriages, in a state of nature, and abounding with the means of subsistence for men and horses. In a word, the journey from Missouri to the Internal Provinces is shorter and easier than the journey from Missouri to Pennsylvania. This fact, palpable to the sense of the enterprising inhabitants of Missouri, produced its natural effect: about three years ago, it induced a small company of adventurers to go out with merchandise: their success induced others to adventure in each succeeding year; and, in the month of May of the present year, (1824,) a caravan of eighty-two men, forty-two pack-horses, twenty-three four wheeled carriages, and one piece of field artillery, followed their example, and successfully accomplished the expedition. The capital embarked in the adventures, consisting of dry goods, has usually been small, but has yielded a profit of several hundred per cent.; and the returns of this year, in silver, beaver, and mules, are estimated at one hundred and thirty thousand dollars: an amount considerable in itself, in the commerce of an infant state, but chiefly deserving of consideration as an earnest of the future proceeds of a regulated and protected trade. The protection which the trade demands chiefly refers itself to the Indians inhabiting or roaming over the intermediate country between Missouri and the Internal Provinces. A right of passing is needed through their country, and security against the robberies and murders which all savages are prone to commit on the traveller and merchant; several instances of which have already occurred in the prosecution of this trade. An extension of the system of Indian intercourse, from the east to the west bank of the Mississippi, will accomplish these objects. Roads, stations, agencies, and treaty stipulations for good behavior on the part of the Indians, and subsidies, in the shape of annuities, on the part of the United States, secured to the people of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio, an early commercial intercourse with Natchez and New Orleans, and converted the intermediate tribes, from wild hunters, to settled farmers, living in houses, cultivating the soil, planting orchards, and educating their children. The same policy may produce the same effect on the west as well as the east side of the Mississippi: commerce is the civilizer of mankind. To these protections and facilities, in passing through the Indian nations, should be added the authority of consuls in Santa Fe, Chihuahua, and Durango, to guard the rights of their fellow citizens, protect them from impositions, and furnish an official organ of complaint to both governments, in the event of any abuses from the local authorities. In making these demands upon the federal government, the undersigned petitioners claim the benefit of that policy which, with fleets, of ambassadors and consuls, protects the persons and the property of American citizens upon every sea, in the most remote countries, and upon distant isles.

They would feel themselves to be safe in resting the success of their petition upon the manifestation of the single fact, *that the interest of Missouri alone was concerned in the event.* But the interest of the question is not limited to her: it extends itself to other parts of the union—to the cotton grower of the south, and to the cotton manufacturer of the north. The principal article carried out to the Internal Provinces, is cotton goods, the growth and manufacture of the United States. In opening a new, increasing, and permanent market for the consumption of this article, the people of Missouri mingle their interest, and divide their advantages, with the inhabitants of the most sections of the union. Other reasons for the encouragement of trade and intercourse between Missouri and the Internal Provinces, growing out of the policy which should promote the spread of republican principles and diffusion of knowledge, are too obvious to be insisted upon, and are left, by the undersigned, to the enlightened consideration of the Congress.

And your petitioners will pray, &c.

Missouri, Oct. 1824.

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FRANKLIN, Mo. 19th August, 1824.

SIR: In compliance with your wishes, as expressed during your stay at this place, I have collected, and hasten to transmit you all the information that can be, at this time, procured, in relation to the internal trade between this section of Missouri and Santa Fe, one of the provinces of Mexico.

The history of this commercial intercourse, as you have desired it should, you will observe, embraces every subject on which it will be material that you should be informed, with a view to the maturity of the plan you have in contemplation, of obtaining from the national Legislature such protection for, and facilities to, those interested in it, as may be practicable.

The principal facts herein contained, in addition to those which have come under my own observation, have been politely furnished by Col. Cooper, an old and very respectable inhabitant of this county. One of the first enterprizes in this trade was planned, and the party conducted, by this gentleman.

The route pursued by the first adventurers was more circuitous than that at present travelled; and the distance, which was originally believed to present a serious obstacle to this trade, has been so much reduced, by a better knowledge of the country, as to form no considerable objection to a profitable prosecution of this novel and interesting commerce.

In the summer of 1822, there were two expeditions fitted out from this town and its vicinity. The one commanded by Col. Cooper was composed of sixteen persons; they carried with them but little merchandise, and received in exchange, specie, jacks, jennets, and



mules. Col. Cooper and party transported their goods upon pack horses and mules.

Mr. Becknal, the leader of the second party, (of twenty-one men,) took with him a wagon, as did also two or three of his associates. These parties both returned the same season that they went out.

In the autumn of 1821, Mr. Becknal had left this place for the uninhabited country that lies between Missouri and the upper province of Mexico, for the purpose of hunting game and to procure wild horses. In his wanderings, he had, either by accident or design, fallen into the Spanish settlements, and proceeded as far as the town of Santa Fe. He returned in the following December and January, having left one or two of his party behind him. To him we may, therefore, attribute the discovery of the route.

Encouraged by these successful essays, in the spring, or the beginning of 1823, an association of about *thirty-five* adventurers formed themselves into something like a caravan, with laws or rules, enacted by common consent, for their government; and they likewise appointed officers to enforce their obedience. The whole of their merchandise was packed on horses and mules; and it consisted of such articles of dry goods as are usually vended in the shops of this country. They disposed of their merchandise for cash, beaver, jacks, and jennets, and mules.

In the month of May, 1824, a caravan of seventy-eight men was formed, who took with them twenty-three carriages, and about two hundred horses. The total amount of their merchandise was, probably, 24,000 dollars. It consisted of almost every kind of dry goods that is vended in this country. Mr. Le Grand was appointed Caravanbachi, or head of the caravan. This gentleman had resided some time in Santa Fe, and is well informed in the customs of the province. He is a young man of fine genius and liberal acquirements. He is of opinion that the capital employed in this trade may be increased to a considerable extent.

Several men of character have, this year, embarked in the Santa Fe trade, and who have the ability to employ more capital than they were willing to risk, until they had made themselves acquainted with the hazards to be encountered. This caravan is expected to return in the autumn of the present year.

The distance from this place to Santa Fe, and to the village of Tous, is seven hundred and eighty miles, according to the most accurate computation that has been made. From this place to the point where the Santa Fe track leaves the Missouri, a little below Fort Osage, is eighty miles; from thence to the Ne-o-sho branch of the Arkansas, is one hundred and fifty miles; and from this to the main branch of Arkansas one hundred and fifty miles; after crossing, the route lies up this river a distance of one hundred miles. On leaving the river, a desert of sand hills, of six or seven miles, must be crossed, that is almost destitute of herbage, as well as timber. This border of country extends an unknown distance north and

south, or parallel with the river. From the main branch of the Arkansas river to Santa Fe, is estimated at three hundred miles.

The whole distance from the settlements on the Missouri to the mountains in the neighborhood of Santa Fe, is a prairie country, with no obstructions in the route, except the rivers and creeks, and those are generally fordable, with firm sloping banks. No bridges are deemed necessary. A good wagon road can, therefore, be traced out, upon which a sufficient supply of fuel and water can be procured, at all seasons, except in winter. The course pursued, after leaving settlements on the Missouri river, is a little south of southwest. The province of Santa Fe is said to be populous. Its circulating medium is made up of silver coins, and the metal is as pure as our own. Some few base coins are in circulation in that country, but they are easily detected.

The people of this province reside in villages, for their mutual security. They may be said to be a community of shepherds, who possess immense herds of neat cattle and sheep. They give but little attention to agriculture, being but little encouraged to do so by the soil or climate of their country.

The most acceptable service that could be rendered those engaged in this inland trade, would be to mark a road, so as to enable them to pursue their operations without loss of time or distance.

This might be effected by erecting, at suitable intervals, stone pillars, or marks, to designate the track. The country abounds in stone suitable for this purpose.

If an appropriation can be obtained to effect this object, allow me to suggest, that two Commissioners, authorized to lay out the road, might, while so engaged, superintend the setting of marks; and, by the aid of a surveyor, complete the service in the short space of two or three months. Col. Benjamin Cooper, from whom I have obtained much information on this subject, I think eminently qualified for this service. You are probably aware that he is a man of good understanding, which, I believe, is not in the least impaired by age. He is well acquainted with the courses and distances, and is an excellent woodsman. He might be associated in commission with some individual whose literary acquirements would qualify him to give a satisfactory account of their proceedings. A small detachment of troops might be employed on this service, who would execute the labor contemplated, and thus the expense of the enterprize would amount to a very inconsiderable sum. Or some twenty or thirty citizens of this country could be engaged on the same terms that the Rangers were employed, for frontier service, during the late war.

Since writing the above, I have conversed with Mr. Becknal, who is about to depart for Santa Fe, accompanied by sixteen men. He intends to visit the Oregon before he returns. He will probably be absent about ten months.

The trade with Santa Fe, from this place, is attended with some peculiar advantages. The merchandise is transported by means of horses raised here, which are fed on the herbage found in abundance

on the route. The persons engaged in the trade, without trespassing very largely on the domains of red men, subsist themselves in the country they traverse. When they reach their market, no duties are exacted by the government of the country.

Should you require any further particulars, it will afford me pleasure to furnish them.

I am, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant

ALPHONSO WETMORE.

The hon. JOHN SCOTT,

*Member of Congress.*